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ABSTRACT

Clifford Glenn Christians' work in the area of media ethics education from 1976 through 1984 has influenced the way media ethics is taught to many college students today. This time period includes, among his other accomplishments, Christians' work on an extensive survey of how media ethics was taught in the late 1970s, his work on the Hastings Center monograph "Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education," and his creation in 1983 of the book "Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning," a textbook that is still used today. In 1984, important events in the teaching of media ethics occurred, events in which Christians was instrumental in one way or another. The effects of these events, which included the creation of a teaching workshop for educators and a journal for mass media ethics, are still visible today. (Contains 124 notes. Details on Christians' degrees and professional experience are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Beyond War Stories:

Clifford G. Christians' influence on the teaching of media ethics, 1976-1984

Lee Anne Peck

Doctoral student

Scripps School of Journalism

Ohio University

Athens, OH 45701

(740 589-7767

lee.peck.1@ohiou.edu

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Beyond War Stories:
Clifford G. Christians' influence on the teaching of media ethics, 1976-1984
(150-word abstract)

Clifford Glenn Christians' work in the area of media ethics education from 1976 through 1984 has influenced the way media ethics is taught to many college students today. This time period includes, among his other accomplishments, Christians' work on an extensive survey of how media ethics was taught in the late 1970s, his work on the Hastings Center monograph *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education,* and his creation in 1983 of the book *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*, a textbook that is still used today. In 1984, important events in the teaching of media ethics occurred, events in which Christians was instrumental in one way or another. The effects of these events, which included the creation of a teaching workshop for educators and a journal for mass media ethics, are still visible today.

In the 1960s, while in his twenties, Clifford Glenn Christians studied Greek classics, theology, and linguistics.[1] By the early 1970s, he was pursuing his doctorate in communications at the University of Illinois. He took a political philosophy course, "World Views, Democratic Societies, and the Press," that piqued and kept his interest. The class covered ethics and technological order and was his "entry into media ethics," he said.[2]

French social philosopher Jacques Ellul influenced Christians—particularly Ellul's studies of the sociology of technological societies.[3] German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who is known for his promotion of the "public sphere" theory, was also an influence.[4] Social ethics became a focus of Christians' studies—especially how social ethics relates to the media.

Christians received his doctorate in 1974 and stayed at the University of Illinois; today he is the director of the Institute of Communications Research. His interest in media ethics continues, and one of his continual research projects is tracking how media ethics is taught. "He is a faithful colleague who has played an important role [in the teaching of media ethics]—especially in the exposition of theory and outlining a research

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[1] For complete details on Christians' degrees and professional experience, see Appendix A.
[2] Interview, Clifford G. Christians, May 8, 2000.
[3] Christians' doctoral dissertation was titled *Jacques Ellul's La Technique in a Communications Context*. Ellul's theory, *la technique*, transforms message systems into propaganda networks; therefore, the media are not just channels of information but providers of propaganda.
[4] The public sphere theory supports the idea of sanctioning political authority through rational discussion and agreement, an objective of democratic theory.

agenda for the field of ethics in journalism," said Ed Lambeth, a University of Missouri journalism professor and teacher of ethics.[5]

In 1976, Christians wrote a paper, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," which he presented at the national conference of Association of Education in Journalism.[6] In this essay, he pointed out that the study of ethics had been a haphazard enterprise since the 1920s, but he noted an increasing interest in the topic in the 1970s. He turned to Ellul:

> Jacques Ellul observes our increasing pleas for more responsible media practice. Yet, he argues, stronger codes and more accuracy and more substantive theory are only ephemeral. Our preoccupation with technological and bureaucratic efficiency, Ellul declares, will not allow genuine oughts to prosper. Any judgment to be moral must by definition involve choice, and our conscious, free decision is virtually precluded by our monolithic, standardized, overwhelmingly propagandized environment .
>
> The inability of our scholarship [in media ethics] to solve all the analytic difficulties involved does not indicate that ethical considerations are hopeless or principal work a failure; the complexities are a testimony to the fertility of human evolution. The issue for academic communications is not whether our work yields neat and immediate categories, but whether the fundamental benefit of our profession always remains, in theory and fact, our central concern.[7]

His presentation and subsequent journal article caught the attention of those academics who were grappling with such concerns. For instance, Jay Black, Poynter-Jamison chair in media ethics at the University of South Florida, said that when he heard Christians' paper presentation in 1976, he was "very influenced" by Christians.[8] "I didn't realize there was such a void—Cliff impressed me as a young, serious academic with a good intellect. I thought, 'There is at least one good mind in this field.'"[9]

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[5] E-mail correspondence, Ed Lambeth, May 20, 2000.
[6] For an abridged version of this presentation, see Clifford Christians, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," *Journal of Communication* 27 (Autumn 1977): 19-29.
[7] *Ibid.*, 27.
[8] Telephone interview, Jay Black, May 7, 2000.
[9] Telephone interview, Black, May 7, 2000.

This paper will show why Christians was influential in the field of media ethics education from 1976 through 1984, a time period that includes, among other accomplishments, his work on an extensive survey of how media ethics was taught in journalism schools in the late 1970s,[10] his work on the Hastings Center monograph, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education,*[11] and his creation in 1983 of the book *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*, a textbook that is still used today.[12] The paper ends in 1984, when important events in the teaching of media ethics occurred, events in which Christians was instrumental in one way or another. The effects of these events, which included the creation of a teaching workshop for educators and a journal for mass media ethics, are still visible today.

Historical Background: Before the 1970s

Christians and John Nerone point out that the behavior of journalists has been criticized since newspapers were first published.[13] The conduct of journalists was not conceived as "ethics," or responsibilities of the journalist, until the 1890s, a time when journalism became "a corporate economic structure marketing a commodity for consumers."[14] Christians and Nerone say that "with the industrialization of the press,

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[10] Clifford G. Christians, "Variety of Approaches Used in Teaching Media Ethics," *Journalism Educator* 33 (April 1978): 3-8, 24. A version of this essay was presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Journalism Education in August 1977 in Madison, Wisconsin.

[11] Clifford G. Christians and Catherine L. Covert, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education* (New York: Hastings Center Monographs, 1980).

[12] Clifford G. Christians, Kim Rotzoll, and Mark Fackler, *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1983). A second edition was published in 1987; a third in 1991; a fourth in 1995, a fifth in 1998; and a sixth in 2000.

[13] Clifford Christians and John Nerone, "An Intellectual History of Media Ethics" (paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 1999, New Orleans, Louisiana). Christians also wrote a version of this paper for the European Centre for Ethics (Leuven, Belgium), in October 1999. It is noted that the first time that "ethics" was used in a title by press critics was in July 1989. See W.S. Lilly, "The Ethics of Journalism," *The Forum* 4 (July 1989): 503-512.

[14] Christians and Nerone, "An Intellectual History of Media Ethics."

media occupations, especially journalism, began to redefine themselves as a middle-class profession, and then to seek a place within the rising university system."[15]

Journalism courses and programs were created not only to teach basic skills to budding journalists but to also "enhance [journalism's] respectability in the face of heated public criticism."[16] However, at the turn of the century, Christians says that journalism ethics was not operating with the needed intellectual tools, not with an ethics that involved theory.[17]

In the 1920s, though, that changed. The field became interested in more than just the responsibilities of the profession. "Ethics came to the scene," Christians says, and journalists and journalism professors began exploring social responsibility.[18] Therefore, addressing ethics in journalism courses came to the forefront in the 1920s and early 1930s. Several textbooks became available, and all expressed commitment to "journalism's professional status" and dealt with the ethics of the profession.

Nelson Antrim Crawford, the department head of the Industrial Journalism program at Kansas State Agricultural College, published *The Ethics of Journalism* in 1924.[19] Written as a textbook, it highlights the charges against newspapers of that time. Crawford wrote that the public believes "the press is not fulfilling its function."[20]

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[15] *Ibid.* The authors also note that by the early 1920s, journalism courses were being taught in colleges and universities in several Plains states and in universities on the Pacific Coast.
[16] *Ibid.* Note that in the late 1800s, "roorbacks," or false statements (which were named for a fictional character, Baron Von Roorback, a traveler who described the atrocities of slavery and said, falsely, that President James K. Polk branded forty-three slaves so as to discredit him) were prevalent, and Crawford speculates that people became prejudiced because of such material and other "fakes." See Nelson Antrim Crawford, *The Ethics of Journalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925): 39-48.
[17] Interview, Christians, May 8, 2000.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Nelson Atrium Crawford, *The Ethics of Journalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924).
[20] *Ibid.*, 39.

He continued: "Concretely, it charges the newspaper with not telling the truth; or, to put it more exactly, with not publishing the objective facts in an unbiased manner. Closer observers, both writers and speakers, accuse the newspaper of certain specific deficiencies in connection with its function of disseminating objective facts.[21]

In his chapter "Setting Professional Standards: Educational Agencies," Crawford asked the questions: "What then may be done for the betterment of journalistic practice by the schools of the United States? What may they accomplish toward the elimination of conscious anti-social tendencies in the press, and more important, of ignorance, inertia, and fear as factors in journalism?"[22]

Crawford noted that twenty U.S. institutions offered degree curricula in journalism, and 200 more offered some journalism instruction in 1924. "The young men and women now studying at journalism schools designed for the purpose will be an important factor—perhaps the most important factor—in American newspaper work not many years hence," he wrote.[23] He pressed for intellectual and ethical training rather than just technical training because this would enable the future journalist "to serve the public through the press."[24]

In 1925, Leon Nelson Flint, a professor of journalism at the University of Kansas, wrote *The Conscience of the Newspaper*,[25] which offered suggestions on how to deal with ethical dilemmas. He questioned in the book's preface whether a new journalist had the ability to make good ethical decisions in the work place.[26]

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[21] *Ibid.*, 39.
[22] *Ibid.*, 168.
[23] *Ibid.*, 169.
[24] *Ibid.*, 170.
[25] Leon Nelson Flint, *The Conscience of the Newspaper* (New York: D. Appleton, 1925).
[26] *Ibid.*, v.

More than Crawford, Flint emphasized the ethics of dealing with the business side of newspapering—from refusing dishonest advertising to protecting the local advertiser.[27] He said the new journalist comes to his first job with the principles of "fairness, independence, accuracy, service, and the rest"; however, faced with an ethical dilemma such as the suppression of the news because it will harm an advertiser or the insertion of editorial color into the news, the journalist is faced with what "in the abstract appeared simple now appears complex."[28] He explained: "There is a measure of truth in the saying that the ethics of journalism is all comprehended in the one question, what to print and what not to print. But a certain amount of differentiation seems necessary. … Points of view are different and cases given are distinctive."[29]

In his paper "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," Christians wrote that all of the texts from the 1920s did share a similar framework, though, "calling ethics a moral responsibility to one's professional community—a maxim generated largely from the authors' small town and church experience."[30]

> These early academicians realized that codes and courses in ethics could be fostered only when social bonds were firm. They knew that precepts are nurtured and finally sustained only among those with common values, with shared culture. … They did not discuss right actions *per se*, but virtue in terms of social connections.[31]

Outside of academia, Christians pointed out that the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association were the models for working journalists in their search for acceptance as a valid enterprise; codes of ethics were created for journalism professionals. Also, at this time, the college honor society of Sigma Delta Chi, founded in

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[27] *Ibid.*, 244-253.
[28] *Ibid.*, v.
[29] *Ibid.*, vi.
[30] Christians, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," 20.

1909 at DePauw University, borrowed the American Society of Newpaper Editors' Canons of Journalism as its first code.[32] Christians reported that by 1930, fifty-six schools offered journalism degrees.[33]

In 1932, A.F. Henning wrote *Ethics and Practices in Journalism*.[34] Christians said that after this, "the term 'ethics' and its cognates disappeared from book titles for forty years."[35] Why? Christians gave his explanation in a 1978 *Journalism History* article:

> Surveys indicate that mass communications at the turn of the 20th century were infused with a debate over the nature of community and definitions of knowledge. Underneath arguments about ethical codes, curricula, status aspirations, market analysis, and professional organizations, flowed two currents important to the Progressive Era generally--*communis* and epistemology. … The conflicts disappear in the 1930s, answered decisively in terms of statistical communities and objective knowledge. The issues were not resolved; they evaporated.[36]

Christians noted, however, that in the 1950s and 1960s, three academic studies on media ethics were published although they were not intended as textbooks.[37] Two of the books, *The Social Responsibility of the Press* and *Responsibility in Mass Communication*, emphasized responsibility, Christians says; however, he notes that "neither fashion a coordinated ethical theory based on social responsibility."[38] The period before the 1970s was "devoid of serious ethical foundation."[39]

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[31] *Ibid.*, 21
[32] William David Sloan and James D. Startt, *The Media in America: A History* (Northport, Alabama: Vision Press, 1996).
[33] Christians, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," 20.
[34] A.F. Henning, *Ethics and Practices in Journalism* (New York: Long and Smith, 1932).
[35] Christians, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," 21.
[36] Clifford G. Christians, Quentin J. Schultze, and Norman H. Sims, "Community, Epistemology, and mass Media Ethics," *Journalism History* 5 (Summer 1978): 65.
[37] See William L. Rivers and Wilbur Schramm, *Responsibility in Mass Communication* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); J. Edward Gerald, *The Social Responsibility of the Press* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963; and Kyle Hasseden, *Morality and the Mass Media* (Nashville: Boradman Press, 1968).
[38] Christians. "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," 22.
[39] *Ibid.*, 24

The 1970s

Christians said that in the 1970s, an interest in teaching journalism ethics was revived; he speculated one reason was the coverage of the Watergate affair.[40] "Journalism became highly public," he said.[41] A hodgepodge of books with a variety of scopes was available for the instructor of journalism ethics. Yet, if one looks at the books from that time period, "there was no theory, just war stories," Black said.[42] That is not completely true, however. A few books did introduce some theory.

In 1974, John Merrill wrote an ethics book that stressed libertarian ideals, *The Imperative of Freedom: A Philosophy of Journalistic Autonomy.*[43] In the foreword to his book, Merrill lamented the emphasis on social responsibility in the discussion of media ethics as he explored the philosophical roots of journalistic ethics.[44] Black, who was Merrill's advisee while he attended graduate school at the University of Missouri in the 1970s, explained that Merrill's ideas were individualistic, and "he never bought in" to the idea of social responsibility.[45] However, Merrill did, in his own way, bring ethical theory to the discussion.

In 1975, Merrill and Ralph Barney, a professor at Brigham Young, collaborated on *Ethics and The Press*: *Readings in Mass Media Morality*, an assortment of essays and addresses in which they stated: "Journalistic ethics, we believe, should set forth

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[40] Interview, Christians, May 8, 2000. Watergate was a scandal involving abuse of power by public officials; the story was covered initially by the *Washington Post*, whose journalists used a few questionable practices to obtain information.
[41] Interview, Christians, May 8, 2000.
[42] Telephone interview, Black, May 7, 2000.
[43] John C. Merrill, *The Imperative of Freedom: A Philosophy of Journalistic Autonomy* (New York: Hastings House, 1974).
[44] *Ibid.*, 3. See also, Christians, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," 25.
[45] Telephone interview, Black, May 7, 2000.

guidelines, rules, norms, codes—at least broad principles of maxims—that will lead, not force, the journalist to be more humane and not necessarily more "human."[46] They chose essays that introduced ethical systems, and they also presented journalistic ethical dilemmas of the day.

In 1976, John Hulteng of the University of Oregon wrote *The Messenger's Motives: Ethical Problems of the News Media*, a book for "students, practitioners, and the public."[47] He explained that at the time of the writing of his book "few generalized philosophical charters … exist to guide the journalists through the ethical mine fields that come with the territory."[48] In "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," Christians compared the contents of this book to those in the 1920s; however, in the 1970s "the stakes have escalated, the extra-academic battleground is less conducive to thoughtfulness, the guidelines fuzzier," he says.[49]

With this mish-mash of textbooks and fuzzy guidelines,[50] Christians wondered wondered how students were getting ethics instruction in journalism schools. What recommendations could he make? "As one reflects on the issues which practitioners in the media and related fields consider morally problematical, one begins to ask whether the formal educational process adequately prepares journalism students for careers requiring ethical awareness," Christians said.[51]

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[46] John C. Merrill and Ralph D. Barney, *Ethics and the Press* (New York: Hastings House, 1975) x.
[47] John L. Hulteng, *The Messenger's Motives: Ethical Problems of the News Media* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976).
[48] *Ibid.*, 3.
[49] Christians, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," 25.
[50] Joseph P. McKerns, "Media Ethics: A Bibliographic Essay," *Journalism History* 5 (Summer 1978): 50-53, 68. The article notes the books published during this time period.
[51] Clifford G. Christians, "Variety of approaches used in teaching media ethics," *Journalism Educator* 33 (April 1978): 3-8, 24.

From 1977-1979, The Hastings Center—with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund—conducted an extensive study on the status of the teaching of ethics in higher education.[52] Several professors were recruited to do studies and write papers and monographs.[53] They were to discover "the extent and quality of that teaching and of the main possibilities and problems posed by widespread effort to find a more central and significant role for ethics in the curriculum."[54] Christians said he was involved from the beginning with the journalism study.[55] "This was a totally crucial project that established the credibility of teaching ethics," Christians said. "The Hastings monograph created goals for the teaching of [journalism] ethics, and it was the catalyst for the legitimacy of the [media ethics] course."

Christians did his survey of journalism schools in the spring of 1977.[56] A questionnaire was sent to communication program administrators, and 237 programs responded (a ninety-six percent response rate).[57] The survey was designed to identify stand-alone media ethics courses in news-editorial programs (print and broadcasting) and to describe their main features.[58] Observations about how ethics was taught in all journalism schools were compiled as were observations about how ethics was taught in

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[52] The Hastings Center was created in 1969 to address ethical problems of rapid developments in medicine, biology, and the behavioral sciences. Nine monographs were published from the higher education study; topics included, for instance, law, journalism, bioethics, business, social sciences, engineering, and political science.

[53] Daniel Callahan and Sissela Bok were the co-directors of the project.

[54] Clifford G. Christians and Catherine L. Covert, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education* (Hastings-On-Hudson, New York: The Hastings Center, 1980), v.

[55] A year later, in 1978, Catherine Covert of Syracuse University was added to the journalism project.

[56] Clifford Christians, "Courses in Media Ethics" (Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism at Madison, Wisconsin, August 1977). See also Christians, "Variety of approaches used in teaching media ethics"; and Christians and Covert, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education*..

[57] Christians, "Variety of approaches used in teaching media ethics," 3. The survey was mailed to 247 journalism and mass communication programs listed in the January 1977 *Journalism Educator*.

[58] Christians and Covert, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education*, 11.

the specific stand-alone ethics courses, which were offered at twenty-seven percent, or sixty-four, of the schools that responded.[59] The authors observed the following:

1. Theoretical frameworks for organizing the material were not fully developed.[60]
2. Some of the courses might do little more that entrench certain conventions and teach students to appeal to epithets.[61]
3. The intellectual content of these courses tended to be focused more on professional performance than on liberal arts substance.[62]
4. The emerging basic pedagogical debate concerned whether ethics should be taught as a specific course or by absorbing ethics into courses throughout the curriculum.[63]
5. Those committed to a specific course in ethics (the twenty-seven percent) fundamentally disagreed over the location of that course in the curriculum.[64]
6. Law was involved as a major context for thirty percent of the courses.[65]

By taking the findings and combining them with instructional goals of the general report of the Hastings Center Project from *The Teaching of Ethics in Higher Education*, Christians and Covert created recommendations for the teaching of ethics in journalism and mass communication programs.[66] These recommendations became the new starting point for the teaching of journalism ethics for many mass communication educators, and

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[59] *Ibid.*, 16. Take note that the authors state this disclaimer: Observations come from the survey evidence but not from actual observations of the courses being taught.
[60] Christians and Covert, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education*, 16.
[61] *Ibid.*, 19.
[62] *Ibid.*, 20.
[63] *Ibid.*, 21
[64] *Ibid.*, 22
[65] *Ibid.*, 23
[66] Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences, *The teaching of ethics in higher education: a report* (Hastings-On-Hudson, New York: Hastings Center, 1980), 37. The five instructional goals are stimulating the moral imagination, recognizing moral issues, developing analytical skills, eliciting a sense of moral obligation and personal responsibility, and tolerating—and resisting—disagreement and ambiguity.

Christians also considered them seriously as he conceived his textbook, *Media Ethics*, which would be published in 1983.[67]

"Working out an applied ethics for journalism could well become the foremost scholarly objective and be the catalyst for further advance," Christians and Covert wrote. "In this approach one retains an interest in the making of concrete moral judgments, in the way ethical decisionmaking ought to function in the media professions."[68]

Furthermore:

> No one needs to defend any longer the truism that worthwhile casuistry depends on a principled framework, but perhaps another digression, this time to Aristotle, will make the point more precise. Aristotle established that moral knowledge is of a specific kind. Moral knowledge, in his work, is similar to technical skill, in that it must be applied concretely; and, while limiting the intellection of Socrates and Plato, Aristotle did not eradicate theoretical knowledge as an essential component of moral reflection either. Yet moral consciousness for Aristotle cannot be equated with *techne* nor with theoretics (*episteme*); thus he establishes ethics as a discipline independent of both art and metaphysics.[69]

In the chapter of the monograph titled "Major Intellectual Concerns," Christians and Covert recommended that an "appropriate social ethics" be created by mass communications scholars; they did not discount personal conscience, however, and wrote that this personal conscience and social morality should be treated as "the proverbial two sides of the same coin, or as ethics in the narrow and broad sense."[70] Applied ethics needed to refine journalism's goals, the writers said, explaining that although the "public's right to know" is an important commitment, "it is not an adequately developed goal for newsgathering and easily becomes an excuse for immoral behavior when

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[67] Clifford Christians, Kim Rotzoll and Mack Fackler, *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning* (New York: Longman, 1983).
[68] *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education*, 49.
[69] *Ibid.*, 50. The authors note that this explanation was helped via George Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 280 ff.
[70] *Ibid.*, 51.

gathering information."[71] They said that a more explicit definition of the role of the press would "aid in scaling down some of the press's imperialistic claims."[72] Justifiability had to be taken seriously, too, the authors said; for an action to be moral, it must be justifiable to the public. [73]

Christians said he believes that his survey and the subsequent monograph done with Coverts "was very key to the teaching of journalism ethics." He said in the early 1980s there were other influences, however, such as the fictional Janet Cooke story that appeared in the *Washington Post*. But, he said, "I would love to believe that this Hastings/Carnegie program was a centerpiece of a new movement forward." [74] Whether he believes it or not, others believe the monograph and his study made a difference—and continue to have an influence. "The Hastings Center suggestions are still valid today," Black said.[75] Christians' *Media Ethics* textbook, however, also made a difference and continues to have an influence. "It became the bible," Black said.[76]

The 1980s

One thing that was established from the study, is that "you need to have intellectual goals in the teaching of ethics," Christians said. "Ethics is an academic enterprise, but this differs from religious training. … This doesn't just belong in the church, but in the academy—this will establish the validity of applied ethics."[77]

When crafting the idea for his textbook, Christians said he believed what was needed was a book that covered not just journalism ethics but media ethics. "There was a

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[71] *Ibid.*, 51.
[72] *Ibid.*, 51.
[73] *Ibid.*, 51.
[74] Interview, Christians, May 8, 2000.
[75] Telephone interview, Black, May 7, 2000.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] Interview, Christians, May 8, 2000.

need for something for students in the other fields, too," he explained.[78] The few books that were available in the late 1970s and early 1980s were specifically for print and/or broadcast journalists—not for those involved in the other fields that typically come under the umbrella of mass communication studies such as advertising. He wanted to address professional values seriously, but he also wanted to show that there was a difference between ethics and values.

"Values are sometimes how we rationalize," Christians said. "But those who dominate the [journalism] field, can saturate the field—and there is a feeling that you can't contradict them! It's not always clear what to do. These 'professional values' are a bit more simplistic than the complicated world."[79]

With a grant from the McCormick Foundation, Kim Rotzoll, also at the University of Illinois, and Christians worked together on the framework for the book—a social ethics framework.[80] They analyzed ethical decision making in three areas: broadcasting, newspapers, and advertising. The book was then divided into three sections: news, advertising, and entertainment; seventy-six cases were presented. In the introduction, however, which Christians wrote, The Potter Box was introduced.

The Potter Box is an ethical decision-making guide based on Harvard theologian Ralph Potter's model.[81] As Christians and Rotzoll did their initial research for the book, Diane Weddington, a student and colleague of Karen Lebacz, who was formerly a doctoral student of Potter's, recommended that they look at his model.[82] Christians said:

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[78] *Ibid.*
[79] *Ibid.*
[80] E-mail correspondence, Clifford Christians, May 19, 2000.
[81] Ralph B. Potter, Jr., "The Logic of Moral Argument" in Paul Deats, Ed., *Toward a Discipline of Social Ethics* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1972): 93-114.
[82] E-mail correspondence, Clifford Christians, May 19, 2000.

"Since Potter is a social ethicist, and our thinking for the book was a social ethics framework—and given our mutual interest in guided decision making—this possibility recommended itself to me immediately."[83]

Christians said he personally wants media ethics done in a "social arena."[84] "Think of the responsibility of the press," he said:

> The First Amendment guarantees that [journalists] have a watchdog function. But what about [journalists' responsibility] to society? Potter wants to understand flesh and blood. He wants to go beyond theory and metaethics. What about the violation of the sanctity of human beings? There is a responsibility to readers. It is an important goal in the classroom to point this out.[85]

The Potter Box is about social ethics, Christians pointed out. It is not individualistic. Therefore, it is not just about philosophy; it is also about sociology. Christians said that people can reach justified conclusions via analytic reasoning when they use The Potter Box. Via the Potter Box, "we learn to do ethics well because we can't make good decisions via assumptions," he said.[86]

The Potter Box has four quadrants, which are named the following: definition, values, principles, and loyalties. The top two quadrants of the box ("definition" and "choosing loyalties) are sociological/external, dealing with real-life situations. The bottom two quadrants are internal/philosophical, or theoretical. "We work back and forth between the practical and the theoretical," Christians said; thus, this is applied ethics.[87]

"From my personal experience and the testimony of reviewers of our first five editions [of *Media Ethics*] and of those I've talked to, is that in a semester's time, the

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[83] *Ibid.*
[84] Interview, Christians, May 8, 2000.
[85] *Ibid.*
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] Notes taken from videotaped lecture, Clifford Christians, "Potter Box" (Spring 1997). Tape is available from the Institute for Communications Research, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Potter Box becomes reasonably natural and empowering [to use]," Christians said.[88] He noted, however:

> The classroom and newsroom are two venues that have continuities and discontinuities under any teaching method. The difference and similarities in dynamics between liberal arts' critical thinking in an academic setting and actionable decisions in a professional setting are a broader problem for teaching and curriculum, whether one uses the Potter Box or not.[89]

The bottom right quadrant of the Potter Box is the "principles" quadrant; this is the quadrant where one makes a decision about which ethical theory one is considering in the ethical decision making process. Christians described five ethical theories in the introduction to the book. "What we have chosen are five major theories that have dominated theoretical concepts in the West," he said. "Virtue, duty, results, love, and rights. … What we're attempting to do is focus on those five theories." He stressed, however, that no theory is "the final answer." The third quadrant is just one part of working one's way through the Potter Box.

It must be noted, however, that Christians brought these five theories to the attention of journalism educators and students—not that some of them had never heard of them before or considered them when teaching ethics. Lou Hodges, a Washington and Lee professor who studies and teaches journalism ethics, said that Christians has "contributed more than anyone else to the study of the theoretical foundations of the subject."[90]

Jay Black has been introducing his media ethics students to The Potter Box since the mid-1980s. "He shows that journalistic ethics should be/ could be connected to philosophy. … [With the Potter Box] you can touch base with what you already know

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[88] E-mail correspondence, Christians, May 19, 2000.
[89] *Ibid.*

and what you already believe. You can ask yourself: Am I hurting someone? Am I benefiting society?" he said. "Media ethics is more of a justifiable enterprise if it's theoretically solid."[91]

Garrett Ray, an ethics professor at Colorado State University, has used *Media Ethics* in his courses since the mid-1980s. Ray came to academia after twenty-four years as a professional journalist. His interest in ethics came "mostly from being a local newspaper editor and publisher and having to make decisions almost every day that had ethical implications—especially conflicts of interest, source issues, and treatment of sources."[92]

He heard of Christians and the Potter Box when he attended a workshop for new college instructors at Indiana University in the mid-1980s. He began using the book during the 1985-1986 school year. Ray said that Christians and The Potter Box have influenced him to see ethics as "a process." He continues to encourage his students to use The Potter Box "to help them examine WHY they make decisions and HOW they make them."[93]

Deni Elliott, director of the Practical Ethics Center at the University of Montana, met Christians in the early 1980s while she was a graduate student studying ethics at Harvard. As part of her doctoral dissertation, she observed Christians—among other media ethics professors—teaching a media ethics class as a visiting professor at Calvin

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[90] E-mail correspondence, Lou Hodges, May 2, 2000.
[91] Telephone interview, Black, May 7, 2000.
[92] E-mail correspondence, Garrett Ray, May 1, 2000.
[93] *Ibid*

College where he taught the Potter Box. "I see the need to simplify how to solve ethical issues—and the Potter Box is a systematic moral analysis," she said.[94]

Christians emphasized, however, that the introduction to his book where he describes each of the five ethical theories is not enough discussion of the theories. An instructor must supplement the textbook; otherwise, the theories are presented "too superficially."[95] He noted, too, that "if there is a general debate [an ethical dilemma] with no theory in the classroom, there is confusion, and students leave scratching their heads. We need to guide their decision-making process—and the Potter Box is one way of doing it—the Potter Box helps students pursue the issue further."[96] The book provided no right or wrong answers to the cases presented—it simply provided the tools for making decisions.

Three reviews were found of the 1983 edition of *Media Ethics*. Richard Goedkoop, a professor at La Salle College, said the book "fills a need that is quite critical."[97] Douglas Campbell of Lock Haven University complained that seventy-six cases could not be covered adequately in 300 pages; however, he noted "the first-rate introduction" and said that it was "in itself very nearly worth the cost of at least the paper edition. It particular, the brief recapitulations of five approaches to ethics are pedagogical gems."[98] In his conclusion, Campbell wrote: "It is … at least one step beyond the meager efforts of most reporting textbooks to do little more than attempt to identify the issues."[99]

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[94] Telephone interview, Deni Elliot, May 2, 2000. See Denise Elliott, *Toward the Development of a Model for Journalism Ethics Instruction* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1984), 33-54.
[95] Interview, Christians, May 8, 2000.
[96] *Ibid.*
[97] Richard J. Goedkoop, book review (no title), *Journal of Broadcasting* 28 (1984): 375-377.
[98] Donald S. Campbell, "Ethics," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (1985): 160.
[99] *Ibid.*

In his *Media Ethics* review, Paul Levinson of Fairleigh Dickinson University noted there had been "very little in the way of philosophical and ethical analysis of mass media."[100] He said the textbook, along with *Philosophy and Journalism* by Merrill and S. Jack Odell, were "welcome because they call attention to this very important task, demonstrating the value of traditional philosophical approaches in comprehending and directing the workings of our mass media."[101]

Levinson said that the book had a "stunning array of cases," which was contrary to Campbell's comments; he said, "The compendium of fascinating cases is itself worth the price of the volume and makes it a valuable textbook and sourcebook."[102] Levinson echoed the other two reviewers: "Since … textbooks on media morality are all too rare, *Media Ethics* serves a most important function."[103] He said, however, he would like to see even more elaboration on "significant ethical issues."[104]

1984 and Beyond

In 1984, several important events happened in the field of media ethics education, and Christians was linked to all of them in one way or another. In that year, Gannett began an annual weeklong "teaching ethics" workshop for journalism educators, and Jay Black and Barney created the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*. The Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's Ethics Committee took a look at the number of stand-alone ethics courses existing in journalism programs since Christians' 1977 study, and Deni Elliott finishes her dissertation, "Toward the Development of a Model for Journalism Ethics Instruction."

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[100] Paul Levinson, "Media philosophy," *Journal of Communication* 33 (Autumn 1983): 84-86.
[101] *Ibid.*, 84
[102] *Ibid.*, 85.
[103] *Ibid.*

Lambeth, who was the director of the journalism school at the University of Kentucky at this time, said he had "come to believe that journalism educators across the country needed to learn how to teach ethics more deeply and perceptively."[105] He applied for a grant from the Gannett Foundation to hold a weeklong workshop. Lambeth designed, organized, and directed the workshop. He said the instruction team that first year consisted of Chistians, Elliott, Hodges and Walter Jaehnig, now of Southern Illinois University. This same team has been involved for most of the remaining years, Lambeth says.[106] In the ethics workshop, Lambeth noted that "Christians' primary role has been as an articulator and advocate for the role of ethical theory in advancing the specific field of media ethics."[107] In 1984, Christians introduced the Potter Box to workshop participants.

Before 1984, Lambeth knew Christians from their work together in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. "He was instrumental in creating the Ethics Committee with AEJMC, which raised the consciousness of the membership of the burgeoning ethics literature in the professions generally and the need for such scholarship in AEJMC," Lambeth explained. "I'd say Cliff was a 'drum major' for media ethics."[108]

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[104] *Ibid*., 84.
[105] E-mail correspondence, Lambeth, May 19, 2000.
[106] *Ibid*. Lambeth explains that the Freedom Forum, into which the Gannett Foundation was reconstituted by Allen Neuharth, funded the workshops for fourteen years; the workshops were sponsored by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. In the past three years, the formerly foundation-funded workshops have been one-day events sponsored by the AEJMC's Media Ethics Division.
[107] E-mail correspondence, Lambeth, May 19, 2000.
[108] *Ibid*. Lambeth points out that he takes the "drum major" phrase from Martin Luther King, who once called himself "a drum major for justice."

In the spring of 1984, the AEJMC Ethics Committee, of which Christians was a part, "decided to see if the quantity and quality of ethics instruction had increased."[109] The 1977 study had become the benchmark, and the same survey instrument was used. Christians noted:

> Within its own boundaries, media ethics appears to be a growth industry. Conventions include ethics programs regularly. ...The Gannett, Poynter and Markle foundations, and the American Society of Newspaper Editors are funding research and teaching in ethics. Three new books have emerged on the subject in the last year, another eight or nine are in process.[110]

The study found that, indeed, stand-alone ethics courses had increased. In 1984, 117 media ethics courses were offered compared to 1977 when sixty-eight were offered. Disagreement over the appropriate instructional strategy continued among the respondents, though.[111] Christians wrote"

> Certainly our consciousness about ethics instruction has been elevated, but our instructional materials and practice are not obviously more substantive. ... The 1980 Hastings/Carnegie study called for more team teaching and more instructors who are specialists in one area and at least a 'competent amateur' in the other. Scattered reports of such team teaching and well-trained instructors are emerging.[112]

He explained that there is still a need to move from descriptive ethics to normative ethics, and he lamented that perhaps the teaching of media ethics may "always remain an ambiguous enterprise."[113] However, he wrote, the data indicate, that the field will continue to grow and gain more credibility along the way. "Much of what happens in the years ahead certainly depends on our stewardship of it now," he said. [114]

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[109] Clifford G. Christians, "Media ethics courses have increased since 1977," *Journalism Educator* 40 (Summer 1985), 17.
[110] *Ibid.*, 17.
[111] *Ibid.*,18.
[112] *Ibid.*, 19.
[113] *Ibid.*
[114] *Ibid.*, 51.

Black said that this was "an interesting time in the academy" and pointed out that the debate between teaching a stand-alone ethics course or teaching ethics pervasively throughout the curriculum was prominent. Black, who was at Utah State University in 1984, and Barney were participants at the first ethics workshop, which took place at the University of Kentucky. It was there that the editorial board for the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* was formed; many of the original members, including Christians, remain on the board today. "This was the nucleus," Black said. "We really did lay out an aggressive agenda for ourselves."[115] The first issue was published in 1986.

Elliott, who said her interest in journalism started while she was in high school, noted that Christians was one of the key people in the field who influenced her. "If you do an index search in journalism ethics, you will see that he has been prolific; over the years, his scholarship has grown—he has been a student and observer of the field as much as a leader in the field," she said.[116] She met Christians while she was in graduate school and did a case study of his ethics teaching for her dissertation at Harvard; she also taught with him in the Gannett/Freedom Forum ethics workshops.

Elliott said, however, that the most important thing she has learned from Christians, however, was "through modeling."[117] "It is not something I have read in his book or in his articles—he has shown me what it means to have a spiritual conviction and to be able to work with people who do not," she said. Elliott is a Quaker, and he helped her answer the question: "What do I do with my religion?"[118] She explained: "Social justice work is part of who I am as a person. …Cliff showed me in the early years that

[115] Telephone interview, Black, May 7, 2000.
[116] Telephone interview, Elliott, May 2, 2000.
[117] *Ibid.*
[118] *Ibid.*

you can be a person of religious conviction and also communicate and do work that has integrity—that doesn't end up resting on your spiritual beliefs. This is part of the way I learned to do ethics; I watched how Cliff did it."[119]

Lambeth said that Christians' "scholarship in ethics and his role in pushing AEJMC [to address media ethics education] were becoming much more visible in the years from 1976 to 1984."[120] Hodges said the two of them have learned from each other over the years.[121] Ray said that Christians "has clearly been a great influence—not only through his book, but through his articles as well." Black said he only has admiration for "Cliff."

In the mid-1970s, Christians saw a need. He worked toward that goal, and he continues to work toward that goal. *Media Ethics*, now in its sixth edition, is a top-selling textbook.[122] He continues to track how media ethics is taught, and Lambeth has joined him in his pursuits. But "the jury is still out," Christians and Lambeth wrote. "Ethics may always be a marginal area of communications studies."[123] Nonetheless, Christians continues to work, to all appearances, tirelessly toward his commitment "to the best teaching possible, to rigorous research, and to clear-headed thinking" in media ethics.[124]

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[119] *Ibid.*
[120] E-mail correspondence, Lambeth, May 19, 2000.
[121] E-mail correspondence, Hodges, May 2, 2000.
[122] According to www.facultyonline.com, which tracks the sales of college textbooks, *Media Ethics* was one of the top sellers for the 1999-2000 school year.

[123] Clifford G. Christians and Edmund B. Lambeth, "The status of ethics instruction in communication departments," *Communication Education* 45 (July 1996): 236.
[124] *Ibid.* Taken from the last paragraph of "The status of ethics instruction in communication departments."

Appendix A*

Christians' academic background (from www.uiuc.edu)

- Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. B.A. 1961. Greek Classics major.
- Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. B.D. 1964. Reformation History and Culture major.
- Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. Th.M. 1965. Thesis: "The Church at Antioch in Its Cultural Setting."
- University of Southern California, Los Angeles. M.A. 1966. Historico- Comparative Linguistics. Thesis: "Abstractions in Generative-Transformational Grammar as Illustrated by Dikaios."
- University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Ph.D. 1974. Communications. Thesis: "Jacques Ellul's La Technique in a Communications Context." Phi Kappa Phi. Kappa Tau Alpha.
- Princeton University, Visiting Scholar in Ethics, Spring Semester, 1979.
- University of Chicago, Institute Fellow in Social Ethics, University of Chicago Divinity School, 1986-87.
- Oxford University, Pew Evangelical Scholars Program Fellow, Spring Semester, 1995.

Professional Experience

- (1987-present): Director, Institute of Communications Research; Head, Media Studies program, 1987-91; Acting Dean, College of Communications, Spring Semester 1991; Research Professor of Communications; Professor of Journalism; Professor of Media Studies, University of Illinois-Urbana.
- (1986-87): Associate Director for Graduate Studies, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois-Urbana.
- (1983-84): Research Fellow, Philosophy of Technology Project, Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship.
- (1980-1987): Research Associate Professor of Communications; Associate Professor of Journalism, University of Illinois-Urbana.
- (1974-80): Research Assistant Professor of Communications; Assistant Professor of Journalism, University of Illinois-Urbana.

* **A more detailed description can be found at http://www.uiuc.edu.**